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USSR/WEAPONS

CHUNG: Work has been accelerated on the Soviets' first nuclear aircraft carrier. Jane's Defense Weekly reported Tuesday that the carrier could be ready for sea trials by 1988. It's just the first of up to eight Soviet carriers which will be equal in size to the biggest American carrier, the USS Enterprise. It is believed that the new Soviet ship will be called the Kremlin.

JAMIESON: The British defense publication Jane's Weekly is out this morning with secret satellite photographs of a new Soviet threat to the U.S. Navy. The pictures show Russia's first nuclear powered aircraft carrier under construction. The details from Don Porter in London.

PORTER: Western defense experts say she will be named the Kremlin, the Soviet's first nuclear powered aircraft carrier. These satellite photographs by Jane's Defense Weekly show the giant vessel under construction in two sections at a shipyard on the Black Sea. Analysts say when complete the Kremlin will be 1100 feet long, weigh 75,000 tons and carry at least 70 supersonic fighters. The Kremlin will be the first Russian flat top to challenge the dominance of the U.S. carrier battle groups, which for four decades have monopolized the projection of naval power. Until now, the Soviets have relied upon a fleet of much smaller carriers deploying only vertical takeoff jets of limited range. The Kremlin is said to be the first of eight super carriers planned by the Russians, but it will be some time before the fledgling Soviet super carrier fleet goes on active duty.

COL. JOHN ALFORD (Institute of Strategic Studies): ...and I guess it's gonna be a dozen years or more before they're fully operational in the sense that they have the right airplane and they know how to operate it off the carrier with all the complexity that goes into carrier operation which is clearly not something which is easy to do.

PORTER: Normally, satellite photos of emerging Soviet military threats are top secret. Observers here think these photos may have been leaked by American intelligence sources in an attempt to influence the debate in the United States over defense spending, in particular, the argument over whether the U.S. should buy more big expensive super carriers. Don Porter NBC News, London.